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A reflection on the 'Big Draw' events (October 2007 and 2008)

Jo Hassall and Helen Loughran

Every October over 1,200 UK venues, from scout huts and schools to national museums and palaces, take part in 'The Big Draw' (www.campaignfordrawing.org/bigdraw/index.aspx). This annual programme demonstrates that drawing is the perfect medium for learning, observation, self-expression and fun. The campaign celebrates the hundreds of creative ways artists, teachers, cultural educators and others use drawing to connect people with museum and gallery collections, their heritage and the wider community.'

Over the last two years over 200 students from the Faculty of Arts and Society have taken part in mass drawing activities for one day in the Library at Leeds Met under the banner of 'The Big Draw'.

In October 2007 the event took place over 24 hours and found a fitting location in the Library, which from September that year had extended its opening hours to 24/7 opening throughout the year. The 2008 event offered the chance for students to explore how learning spaces might be re-imagined in an innovative and unique way through the drawn (in its widest sense) medium. This involved orchestrating a range of activities that could demonstrate a different kind of exploration and use of a learning and teaching space. Some of the collaborative drawing activities included:

- Drawing an Audience: drawing on a wall of glass panels, students collaborated to draw heads (using references from the Library's art books)
- The Portrait Booth: a hybrid bird hide and photo booth (drawing in the dark and anonymous drawing of sitters to produce portraits)
- The Parlour: Literary Genre Tattoos drawn onto skin (using tattoo pens, not needles!)
- Typo Cube Club: giant cubes with drawn type (sourced from obscure typefaces found in the Library)
- Make it Move Corner: a dedicated area to produce stop-framed animations in a day
- Drawn Bibliography: students drew their research onto glass panels.

The invitation to 'create within the space' offered an opportunity for teachers and students to explore the potential of an existing space from an alternative perspective and to realise some of this potential through a creative process.

The public nature of these events helped students to think about their working practices beyond the

comfort of their own studio space. The impact of an audience meant there was an increased sense of responsibility among students in that their concepts had to be visually communicated in a different place and with more clarity. Depending on the drawing activity involved, there was an acknowledgement by the students that whatever they were drawing had to be done well enough for an audience to be able to 'read' it clearly, leading to a heightened sense of the importance of visual reference and the role of a library in providing this.

Although there was some prior planning from staff of what would happen and where, the excitement and 'buzz' during the event became apparent when unexpected outcomes began to emerge and passers-by took a real interest in what was happening during the 'surprise' transformation of the Library. The way this evolved is unsurprising given the nature of a library, a place to which you can often go for one thing and leave with something completely different. Drawn Post-it™ notes of what people came into the Library to do provided an interesting alternative to a questionnaire as a means of surveying Library users. People were asked to draw what they came in for.

Students were active in proposing their own ideas for different activities on the day, some of which were organised and prepared for in advance. Some outputs were produced in the weeks leading up to the main event, such as animations/films/printed material which we needed to 'commission out' to our students.

Some of the students took real ownership of their contributions and took pride in achieving them in a very public way. Such shared group activity across all levels is especially important in promoting engagement in Level 1 students. It enables them to have a sense of being valued within the wider community and to familiarise themselves with staff and students from that community and beyond. The interaction that took place between students from other Faculties also became instrumental in helping to forge connections between areas of specialisms: for example, Events Management students participated in drawing and discussing how to bring people together in an event such as this. Feedback from students strongly suggested that these events acted as a valuable catalyst in 'kick starting' a process of engagement with developing their creative

